

Message Text

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43

ACTION NEA-16

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 3395

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, TS, US, MASS

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT'S OFFICE CONCERNED THAT US-TUNISIAN
RELATIONS MAY BE SLIGHTLY "STRAINED"

REF: TUNIS 3319

1. SUMMARY. IN BRIEF CONVERSATION JUNE 1, CHEDLY KLIBI, MINISTER-DIRECTOR OF PRESIDENTIAL CABINET, TOLD CHARGE THAT QUESTION OF GRANT MILITARY AID FOR FY 74 HAD BEEN CLEARED UP TO HIS SATISFACTION AND IMPLIED THAT PRESIDENT'S CONCERN OVER SLIGHT "STRAIN" IN USG-TUNISIAN RELATIONS HAD EASED. TUNISIANS, IN EMBASSY 'S JUDGMENT, UNLIKELY REOPEN MATTER OF FY 74 CREDITS. THEY MAY, HOWEVER, DECIDE ACCEPT CREDITS IN FY 75 IF, AS EMBASSY THINKS MAY HAVE HAPPENED, DECISION TO TURN DOWN FY 74 CREDITS WAS BASED UPON EITHER FAULTY OR IMCOMPLETE INFO. END SUMMARY.

2. CHARGE HAD BRIEF CONVERSATION DURING TUNISIAN NATIONAL DAY RECEPTION JUNE 1 WITH CHEDLY KLIBI, MINISTER-DIRECTOR OF PRESIDENTIAL CABINET, AS FOLLOW-UP TO CONVERSATION ON MILITARY ASSISTANCE REPORTED REFTEL.

3. KLIBI TOLD CHARGE THAT FOLLOWING MAY 30 DISCUSSION, HE HAD CALLED MINDEF KHEFACHA AND CONFIRMED THAT GRANT AID
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FOR THIS FISCAL YEAR HAD NOT BEEN SUPPRESSED. PRESIDENT

WAS GLAD TO KNOW IT AND APPRECIATED ASSISTANCE WE WERE PROVIDING. KLIBI THEN ADDED THAT PROBLEM APPARENTLY INVOLVED OUR FISCAL YEAR AS OPPOSED TO TUNISIAN WHICH BEGINS JANUARY 1. POINT HE SEEMED TO BE MAKING WAS THAT INFO ON AVAILABLE FMS CREDITS DID NOT REACH TUNISIANS IN SUFFICIENT TIME TO BE ABLE BUILD IT INTO THEIR BUDGET PLANNING PROCESS FOR NEXT FY (WHICH WE UNDERSTAND HAS DEADLINE OF APRIL 30). HE THEN, HOWEVER, COMMENTED THAT AS HE HAD ALREADY MENTIONED, CREDIT TERMS WERE TOO STRICT. FINALLY, HE ASKED ABOUT GRANT AID FOR FY 75. CHARGE REPLIED THAT HE HOPED GRANT AID WOULD AGAIN BE AVAILABLE IN FY 75, BUT THAT HE COULD GIVE NO ASSURANCES. IN ANY CASE IT WAS MUCH TOO EARLY TO BE ABLE TO TELL.

4. COMMENT: KLIBI SEEMED TO BE SAYING THAT AS RESULT OF CLEARING UP MATTER OF FY 74 GRANT AID, PRESIDENT'S CONCERN OVER "STRAIN" HAD BEEN EASED. WE SHALL PROBABLY HAVE TO WAIT AND SEE, ALTHOUGH PRESIDENT TOLD CHARGE ON RECEIVING LINE AT NATIONAL DAY RECEPTION THAT HE CONSIDERED TUNISIA'S RELATIONS WITH U.S. NOT ONLY TO BE WARM BUT "SPECIAL". RE MATTER OF FY 74 FMS CREDITS, IT SEEMS TO US THAT AS KHEFACHA SAID (TUNIS 3213), DECISION TO TURN CREDITS DOWN DID COME FROM PRESIDENT. IT ALSO SEEMS, HOWEVER, THAT DECISION WAS MADE ON BASIS OF FAULTY OR IMCOMPLETE INFO REGARDING STATUS OF GRANT AID, I.E. PRESIDENT DID NOT FULLY UNDERSTAND GRANT AID SITUATION FROM INFO KHEFACHA HAD PROVIDED HIM. IF THIS CORRECT, IT MAY HAVE IMPORTANT BEARING ON NEXT FY, AND WE SHOULD NOT RULE OUT POSSIBILITY THAT TUNISIANS MAY WELCOME FMS CREDITS THEN. THUS, WHILE GOT IS UNLIKELY REOPEN SUBJECT OF CREDITS FOR FY 74 CITING (IF QUERIED) KLIBI'S REFERENCES TO TERMS AND TO PROBLEMS WITH TWO FISCAL YEARS AND GOT BUDGET PLANNING PROCESS, THEY MAY NOT NECESSARILY TAKE SAME POSITION NEXT YEAR. THEY WOULD CLEARLY WELCOME GRANT AID. THEY MAY ALSO BE INTERESTED IN CREDITS, EVEN IF NOT SUBSTANTIALLY INCREASED IN AMOUNT, IN HOPE THAT WE WOULD UNDERSTAND THIS YEAR'S TURNDOWN WAS BASED ON FAULTY INFO. PARENTHETICALLY, KLIBI'S REFERENCES TO FISCAL YEARS AND BUDGET PLANNING DO NOT SEEM TO US TO HOLD MUCH WATER. AMBASSADOR TOLD ACTING MINDEF BENNOUR OF AVAILABILITY OF CREDIT APRIL 8 ALTHOUGH WE DID NOT THEN HAVE TERMS

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(TUNIS 2061). THERE SHOULD HAVE BEEN QUITE SUFFICIENT TIME TO BUILD THEM INTO THEIR FY 75 BUDGET PROCESS, ALTHOUGH ADMITTEDLY WE MAY BE ATTRIBUTING TOO MUCH TO TUNISIAN ADMINISTRATIVE EFFICIENCY.

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